

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9871

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1159

FOR AF/W SMITH FROM THOMPSON

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: AMGT, EAID, PDEV, DM, US

SUBJECT: STATUS OF PEACE CORPS IN BENIN

1. I AM A BIT UNEASY ABOUT THE LENGTH OF TIME IT IS TAKING PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON TO REACH A DECISION CONCERNING THE FUTURE OF THE PEACE CORPS IN BENIN. AS A RESULT OF THE EMERGENCY MEASURES AND RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED FOLLOWING THE JANUARY 16 MERCENARY ATTACK, WE HAD RECOMMENDED AS AN OPTION, PHASE-OUT BY NORMAL ATTRITION UNLESS THE GOVERNMENT OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF BENIN (GPRB) EXPRESSED A POSITIVE INTEREST IN THE PEACE CORPS' ACTIVITY. AFTER DAVID HUNTER HAD CANVASSED THE MAJORITY OF VOLUNTEERS DURING THIS VISIT TO COTONOU MAY 23 TO 29 HE RECOMMENDED ADVANCING THE DEADLINE TO DECEMBER 1977, UNLESS GPRB EXPRESSED GREATER INTEREST IN VOLUNTEERS PRESENCE. HE HAD HOPED TO HAVE A DECISION BY JUNE 21.

2. SINCE HUNTER'S VISIT THERE HAS BEEN A DEFINITE EASING OF RESTRICTIONS AND SOME EXPRESSION OF APPRECIATION FOR THE PEACE CORPS' WORK IN THE MONO REGION (COTONOU 1100). AT THE SAME TIME I HAVE OBSERVED A DETERIORATION IN VOLUNTEER MORALE STEMMING FROM UNCERTAINTY AS TO WHETHER PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON SETS ANY STORE BY THEIR WORK IN BENIN. THE LONGER THE VOLUNTEERS WAIT WITHOUT THIS ASSURANCE, THE LESS INTEREST THEY HAVE IN THEIR WORK AND THE GREATER DESIRE TO LOOK

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ELSEWHERE FOR THE EXPERIENCE THAT THEY ORIGINALLY SOUGHT HERE. THUS, IN A WAY, PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON IS HURTING VOLUNTEER MORALE MORE THEN LOCAL CONDITIONS HAVE DONE.

3. ANOTHER DIFFICULTY IS THAT ALTHOUGH WE HAVE PROTESTED TREATMENT OF VOLUNTEERS AT NO TIME HAVE WE INDICATED TO THE GPRB THAT WE ARE CONSIDERING A REDUCTION AND POSSIBLE

PHASE-OUT OF THE PEACE CORPS' PRESENCE. IF WE WERE SUDDENLY TO ANNOUNCE THAT ALL THE VOLUNTEERS WERE TO BE WITHDRAWN BY DECEMBER 1977, THIS WOULD CERTAINLY BE INTERPRETED AS A DRASTIC ACTION ON OUR PART INTENDED AS A SLAP AT THE REGIME. IT, IN TURN, MIGHT RESPOND BY EXPELLING THE PEACE CORPS AS A COUNTER-SLAP. THIS WOULD INTRODUCE AN UNNECESSARY IRRITANT INTO OUR RELATIONS. IF PEACE CORPS WASHINGTON DOES INTEND TO PROCEED WITH THE PAHSE-OUT, I RECOMMEND THAT THEY REVISE THEIR DEADLINE IN THE LIGHT OF THE LENGTH OF TIME IT IS TAKING TO REACH A DECISION. AT THIS POINT I WOULD RECOMMEND RETURN TO THE ORIGINALLY PROPOSED DECEMBER 1978 DATE, OR AT LEAST CONTINUING UNTIL JUNE 1978.

4. A FINAL MATTER OF CONCERN IS THE PEACE CORPS TREATMENT OF ACTING DIRECTOR JERRY PASELA WHO HAS DONE AN EXTRAORDINARY JOB UNDER THE MOST DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES. ALTHOUGH NEAR THE FIVE-YEAR STATUTORY LIMIT, HE HAS BEEN PREPARED, WITH PEACE CORPS CONCURRENCE, TO EXTEND FOR SEVERAL MORE MONTHS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN ORDER IN THE PROGRAM WHETHER IT IS PHASED OUT OR SIMPLY REDUCED IN MAGNITUDE. HE IS NOW CONVINCED THAT IF HE WAITS ANY LONGER HE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO EXERCISE OTHER EMPLOYMENT OR STUDY OPTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES. IF PEACE CORPS INTENDS TO CONTINUE IN BENIN, I THINK IT WOULD BE IN THEIR INTEREST TO PROMOTE JERRY, GIVE HIM THE DIRECTOR TITLE AND TRY RETAIN HIM AS LONG AS THEY ARE ABLE IN VIEW OF HIS

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EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE BENINESE PEOPLE AND THE GPRB BUREAUCRACY. I WOULD APPRECIATE ANY EFFORT YOU COULD MAKE TO CLARIFY PEACE CORPS' STATUS IN BENIN.
THOMPSON

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